VOCATIONAL
DISCERNMENT

SECULAR INSTITUTE
LAY SERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST PRIEST

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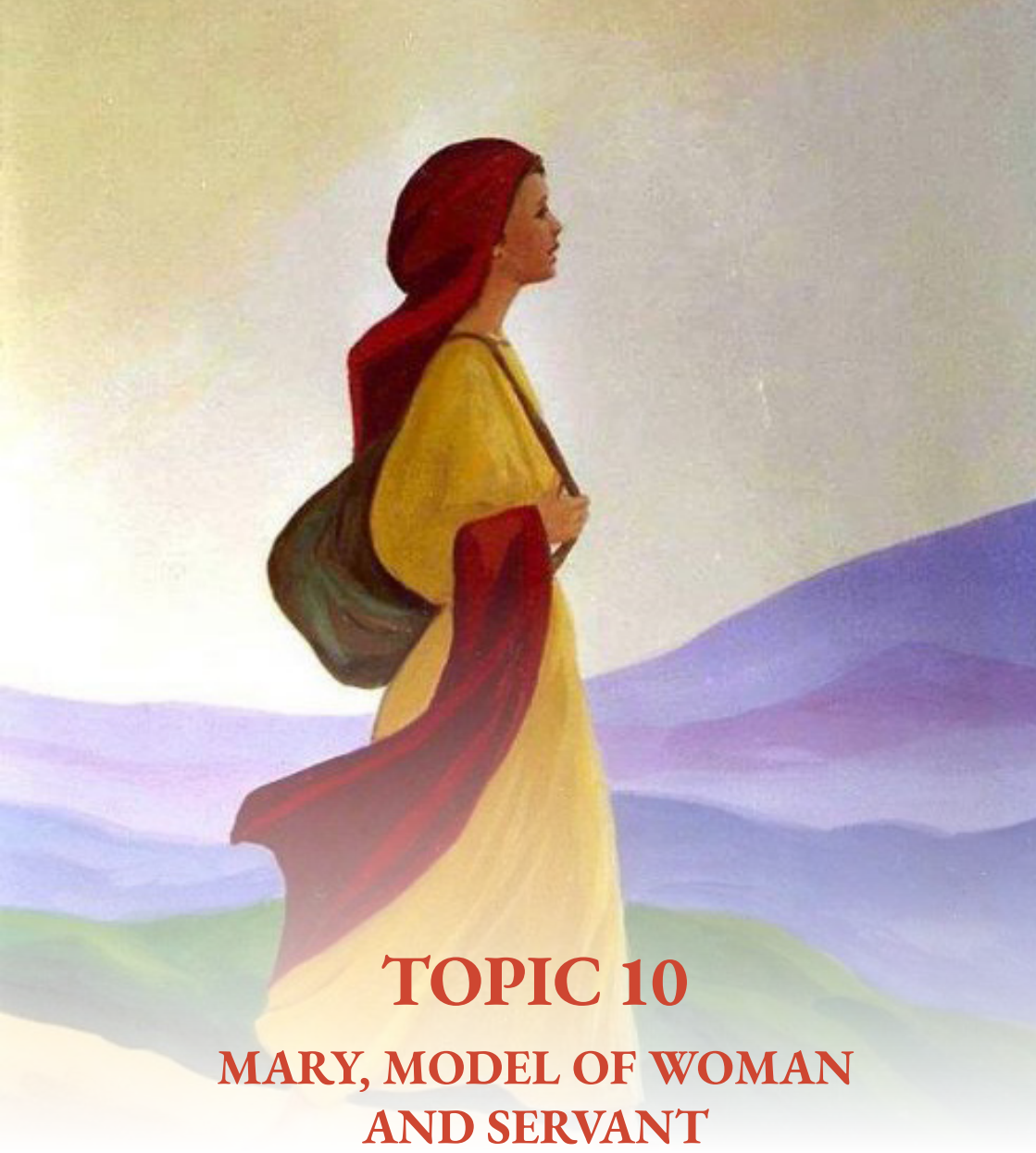

TOPIC 10

MARY, MODEL OF WOMAN AND SERVANT

METHODOLOGY

Guide to study the texts personally:

1. Read the text and underline the ideas you want to highlight or the doubts that arise. Take note of them.
2. Bring to prayer the underlined ideas that you would highlight and the doubts about the text. Explain what calls you feel God is making to you for your daily life.
3. What commitment emerges from these calls? How can you bring them to life? Where do you find resistance?

Presentation of the questions worked on to the person in charge of the formation process.

JOHN PAUL II. GENERAL AUDIENCE

(Wednesday, November 29, 1995)

Mary and the Value of Women

1. Marian doctrine, which has been widely developed in our century from the theological and spiritual point of view, has recently acquired new importance from the sociological and pastoral point of view, among other reasons, thanks to a better understanding of the role of women in the Christian community and in society, as shown by the many significant interventions of the Magisterium.

The words of the message that the Fathers addressed to women throughout the world at the end of the Second Vatican Council on 8 December 1965 are well known: "The hour has come, the hour has come, when the vocation of women is fulfilled in its fullness, the hour when women acquire influence in the world. a scope, a power never hitherto attained" (Ench. Vat. 1, 307).

A few years later, in the Apostolic Letter Mulieris Dignitatem, I confirmed these affirmations: "The dignity of women and their vocation, the constant object of human and Christian reflection, has assumed a very particular importance in recent years" (n. 1).

In this century, the feminist movement has particularly vindicated the role and dignity of women, trying to react, sometimes energetically, against everything that, both in the past and in the present, prevents the valorization and full development of the female personality, as well as her participation in the many manifestations of social and political life.

These are largely legitimate demands that have contributed to achieving a more balanced vision of women's question in the contemporary world. With regard to these demands, the Church, especially in recent times, has shown particular attention, encouraged among other things by the fact that the figure of Mary, if contemplated in the light of what the Gospels tell us about her, constitutes a valid response to the desire for women's emancipation: Mary is the only human person who eminently realizes the plan of divine love for humanity.

2. EThis plan is already manifested in the Old Testament, through the narrative of creation, which presents the first couple created in the image of God: "So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). That is why woman, like man, bears within herself the likeness of God. Since her appearance on earth as a result of God's work, this consideration also applies to her: "God saw all that he had made, and all was well" (Gen 1:31). According to this perspective, the diversity between man and woman does not mean inferiority on the part of women, nor inequality, but constitutes an element of novelty that enriches the divine plan, manifesting itself as something that is very good.

However, God's intention goes beyond what the book of Genesis reveals. In Mary, in fact, God raised up a feminine personality that goes far beyond the ordinary condition of woman, as can be seen in the creation of Eve. Mary's unique excellence in the world of grace and her perfection are the fruit of God's particular benevolence, which seeks to raise everyone, men and women, to the moral perfection and holiness proper to the adopted children of God. Mary is blessed among all women; Yet, to some extent, every woman shares in her sublime dignity in the divine plan.

3. The singular gift that God gave us to the Mother of the Lord not only testifies to what we might call God's respect for women; It also expresses the profound consideration that exists in the divine plan for its irreplaceable role in the history of humanity.

Women need to discover this divine esteem in order to become more and more aware of their high dignity. The historical and social situation that has caused the reaction of feminism was characterized by a lack of appreciation of the value of women, often forced to play a secondary or even marginal role. This has not allowed her to fully express the riches of intelligence and wisdom that femininity contains. Indeed, throughout history, women have often suffered from a low appreciation of their abilities and sometimes even unjust contempt and prejudice. This is a situation which, despite some significant changes, unfortunately persists even today in many nations and in many areas of the world.

4. The figure of Mary manifests such a great esteem of God for women that any form of discrimination is deprived of theoretical foundation.

The marvellous work that the Creator accomplished in Mary offers men and women the possibility of discovering dimensions of their condition that had not been sufficiently perceived before. By contemplating the Mother of the Lord, women will be able to better understand her dignity and the greatness of her mission. But men too, in the light of the Virgin Mother, will be able to have a more complete and balanced vision of their identity, of the family and of society.

The careful consideration of the figure of Mary, as presented to us in Sacred Scripture read in faith by the Church, is all the more necessary in the face of the devaluation that some feminist currents have sometimes made. In some cases, the Virgin of Nazareth has been presented

as the symbol of the feminine personality enclosed in a restricted and narrow domestic horizon.

On the contrary, Mary is the model of the full development of the vocation of women, having exercised, despite the objective limits imposed by their social condition, an immense influence on the destiny of humanity and on the transformation of society.

5. Moreover, Marian doctrine can shed light on the many ways in which the life of grace promotes the spiritual beauty of women.

In the face of the shameful exploitation of those who sometimes transform women into an object without dignity, destined to satisfy dishonest passions, Mary reaffirms the sublime sense of feminine beauty, a gift and reflection of God's beauty.

It is true that the perfection of woman, as it was fully realized in Mary, may at first sight seem an exceptional case, without the possibility of imitation, a model too high to imitate. In fact, the unique holiness of one who enjoyed from the first moment the privilege of the Immaculate Conception was sometimes considered a sign of an insurmountable distance.

On the contrary, Mary's sublime holiness, far from being an obstacle on the path of following the Lord, in the divine plan is destined to encourage all Christians to open themselves to the sanctifying power of God's grace, for whom nothing is impossible. In Mary, therefore, all are called to have total trust in divine omnipotence, which transforms hearts, guiding them towards full availability to his providential plan of love.

JOHN PAUL II. GENERAL AUDIENCE

(Wednesday, December 6, 1995)

The role of women in the light of Mary

1. As I have already had occasion to illustrate in previous catecheses, the role that God entrusted to Mary in his plan of salvation sheds light on the vocation of women in the life of the Church and of society, defining their difference from men. In fact, the model that Mary represents clearly shows what is specific to the female personality.

In recent times, some currents of the feminist movement, with the purpose of favoring the emancipation of women, have tried to assimilate them in everything to men. But the divine intention, as manifested in creation, while wanting woman to be equal to man in her dignity and value, at the same time clearly affirms her diversity and her specific character. The identity of women cannot consist in being a copy of men, since they are endowed with their own qualities and prerogatives, which give them an autonomous peculiarity, which must always be promoted and encouraged.

These prerogatives and this peculiarity of the feminine personality have reached their full development in Mary. In fact, the fullness of divine grace favored in her all the natural capacities typical of women.

Mary's role in the work of salvation depends entirely on Christ's. It is a unique function, demanded by the realization of the mystery of the Incarnation: Mary's motherhood was necessary to give the world the Saviour, the true Son of God, but also perfectly man.

The importance of women's cooperation in the coming of Christ is manifested in God's initiative who, through the angel, communicates

his plan of salvation to the Virgin of Nazareth, so that she may cooperate with him consciously and freely, giving her own generous consent.

Here is realized the highest model of responsible collaboration of women in the redemption of man — of the whole man — which constitutes the transcendent reference for any affirmation of the role and function of women in history.

2. Mary, by carrying out this sublime form of cooperation, also indicates the style by which women must concretely carry out their mission.

Before the angel's announcement, the Virgin does not manifest an attitude of proud vindication, nor does she seek to satisfy personal ambitions. St. Luke presents her to us as a person who only desired to offer her humble service with total and trusting availability to the divine plan of salvation. This is the meaning of the answer: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

In fact, it is not a question of purely passive acceptance, since it gives its consent only after having expressed the difficulty that it is born of her purpose of virginity, inspired by her desire to belong more totally to the Lord.

After receiving the angel's response, Mary immediately expresses her availability, maintaining an attitude of humble service.

It is the humble and valuable service that so many women, following Mary's example, have rendered and continue to render in the Church for the development of Christ's Kingdom.

3. The figure of Mary reminds women today of the value of motherhood. In the contemporary world, this value is not always given a fair and balanced importance. In some cases, the need for women's

work to provide for the ever-increasing demands of the family, and a mistaken concept of freedom, which sees childcare as an obstacle to women's autonomy and possibilities of affirmation, have obscured the meaning of motherhood for the development of the female personality. In others, on the contrary, the aspect of biological generation is so important that it prevents us from appreciating the other significant possibilities that women have to manifest their innate vocation to motherhood.

In Mary we can understand the true meaning of motherhood that reaches its highest dimension in the divine plan of salvation. Thanks to her, the fact of being a mother not only allows the feminine personality, fundamentally oriented towards the gift of life, to develop fully, but also constitutes a response of faith to the vocation proper to woman, which acquires its truest value only in the light of the covenant with God (cf. Mulieris dignitatem, 19).

4. By contemplating Mary attentively, we also discover in her the model of virginity lived by the Kingdom.

Virgin par excellence, in her heart there matured the desire to live in that state in order to reach an ever-deeper intimacy with God.

By showing women called to virginal chastity the high significance of this very special vocation, Mary draws their attention to the spiritual fruitfulness that it takes on in the divine plan: a motherhood of a motherhood according to the Spirit (cf. Mulieris dignitatem, n. 21).

Mary's maternal heart, open to all human miseries, also reminds women that the development of the female personality requires a commitment to charity. Women, who are more sensitive to the values of the heart, show a high capacity for personal dedication.

To those in our time who propose selfish models for the affirmation of the feminine personality, the luminous and holy figure of the Mother of the Lord shows them that only through self-giving and self-forgetfulness for others can the authentic realization of the divine plan for one's life be achieved.

Mary's presence therefore stimulates in women feelings of mercy and solidarity with regard to painful human situations and awakens the desire to alleviate the sorrows of those who suffer: the poor, the sick and those who need help.

By virtue of her particular bond with Mary, the woman, in the course of history, has often represented God's closeness to the expectations of goodness and tenderness of humanity wounded by hatred and sin, sowing in the world the seeds of a civilization that knows how to respond to violence with love.

Pope Francis tells us:

> *"A Church without women is like an apostolic college without Mary. The role of women in the Church is not only motherhood, the mother of the family, but it is stronger; it is precisely the icon of the Virgin, of Mary, that helps the Church to grow. But realize that the Virgin is more important than the Apostles. It's more important. The Church is feminine: she is Church, she is a wife, she is a mother. But women in the Church must not only ... I don't know how to say it in Italian... the role of women in the Church cannot be limited to that of mother, to that of worker, limited... No! It's something else."*
>
> *(Flight from Rio to Rome, July 28, 2013).*

Fr. Juan Sánchez Hernández, our founder, wants to put the Servants in the mold of Mary. From his circulars to the Servants, we highlight:

"I am writing to you on the day of the Annunciation, a 100% priestly feast. When the great mystery of the Incarnation was fulfilled, the Eternal Word was anointed priest of the New Covenant and Mary Most Holy constituted as Mother of Christ the Priest. It was all the work of God's infinite love for men and women and Mary's humble and generous "FIAT". In this attitude of the Virgin Mother of God, who proclaims herself "servant" or "handmaid" of the Lord, the Servants of the Laity of Jesus Christ the Priest have one of the deepest roots of your authentic spirituality. The first is to be sought in the High Priest, Christ Jesus, "who, having the nature of God... He emptied himself, taking on the nature of a "servant" (Phil. 2:6) who "did not come to be served, but to serve" and lived and acted among his disciples "as one who serves". The Captain of all women with a priestly spirit, humbly recognized herself as the handmaid of the Lord, pronounced the "fiat" of surrender to the divine will and this spirit of humble and self-sacrificing dedication to the Father, to her Most Holy Son and to all the redeemed, as Correndentrix and Spiritual Mother, was and continues to be the constant of her earthly and celestial life.

What a spiritual aptitude, so sure, so Marian and fruitfully apostolic, will be that of the Servant Woman, who, after having freely pronounced the "Fiat" of her vows, respects and lives the voluntary renunciation of her own will, in order to submit voluntarily to the will of God, through obedience to the precepts of legitimate superiors, who delicately keeps for the Bridegroom the perfume of her virginity, and who lives detached from perishable goods and vanities, being consistent with the voluntary renunciation of

the free use of them! The "ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbun tuum" (Behold the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word) of the Incarnation, on the lips of Mary lends itself to these and many more reflections."

Circular No. 171-April, 1.969

"Today, the day of the Presentation of the Virgin Child in the Temple and soon, for the days in which you read this Circular, the celebration of the great mystery of her Immaculate Conception, a day that is already "history" in our Institute, I invite you to reflect with me: She was the one preserved, accepted and voluntarily given, to be a MOTHER, CO-REDEMPTORY AND PARTY WALL. They are our easy, perfect, and sure way to go to Jesus. The classic formula: TO JESUS THROUGH MARY, continues to be valid in the post-conciliar period. Consequently, among us daughters: not one step back for many you pass forward in the practice of true devotion to Mary."

Circular No. 191-December 1970

I am writing to you on the day of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin. The humblest and most obedient Mary, offering to the Father, through the ministry of the Elder Simeon, the Priest and Host of the New Covenant, taking over the oblation and host, is a beautiful and exemplary figure of the "priestly souls". Imitate it.

Circular-February 1955